



# U.S. CHESS FEDERATION

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## An Introduction to

# USCF-RATED TOURNAMENTS



Many USCF members find that participation in USCF-rated chess tournaments is one of their favorite benefits. Sanctioned tournaments are sponsored by the USCF or its many affiliated organizations. Players compete against other Federation members under the direction of certified tournament directors. There are tournaments held almost everywhere. There's probably one taking place soon in your area.

### ROUND-ROBIN TOURNAMENTS

In a round robin, you play one game with every other player in the tournament. One common type of round robin is a quad, in which four players of approximately equal ability are grouped into a section. These three-round tournaments are usually played in a single day.

### SWISS-SYSTEM TOURNAMENTS

The Swiss is the most common tournament format in the United States. An unlimited number of competitors play a specified number of

games—no one is eliminated. Normally, as you continue to win games, you face progressively stronger opposition, leaving those not so successful to play against each other. Toward the end of the event, you will probably find yourself matched against players around your own level. Many tournaments have special prizes for new players and novices.

In Swiss-system events, players are paired with each other according to the following general principles:

1. A player is not paired with any other player more than once.
2. Players with the same score are paired whenever possible.
3. Colors are assigned by the director as fairly as possible. Alternating the colors is the ideal.

For the first round, the players are ranked according to their last published official USCF rating. The top player in the upper half of the field is then paired against the top player in the lower half of the field, and so on. The top-ranked player's color in the first round is normally allocated by lot, and then colors alternate down the halves.

In the second round, the director uses the same principles to pair

each of the three score groups (those who won, those who drew, and those who lost). These pairing procedures will continue through the rest of the tournament. In some large tournaments, various "accelerated pairings" are used in early rounds.

The wallchart is important in a Swiss tournament. This listing of players and their results allows everyone to see exactly what is happening in the event. After a wallchart is posted, players normally help the directors by proofreading the entries that interest them.

The sample wallchart at the bottom of this page shows us that John F. Anderson is the top-rated player in the event (because he is ranked No. 1). Anderson's USCF identification number is 12345678; his last published official rating was 1852. In Round 1, he had White against Player 35 and won (for a total of 1 point); in Round 2, he had Black against Player 21 and won (for a cumulative total of 2); in Round 3, he had Black against Player 3 and lost (still a cumulative total of 2); and in Round 4, he had White against Player 12 and drew (for a cumulative total of 2½).

NO.	PLAYER'S FULL NAME -AS SHOWN ON MEMBERSHIP CARD-	RATING	ROUND 1		ROUND 2		ROUND 3		ROUND 4	
			COL.	OPP.	COL.	OPP.	COL.	OPP.	COL.	OPP.
1	<b>JOHN F. ANDERSON</b> ID No. <b>12345678</b>	1852	W	35	B	21	B	3	W	12
			1		2		2		2½	

## CHESS CLOCKS

Another standard part of a sanctioned tournament is the chess clock. Usually, players must bring their own. These special timers are really two separate clock movements and dials or digital read-outs in a single case. When a player makes a move, he presses a button that stops his side of the clock and starts his opponent's side.

In tournament play, any player who has not completed the prescribed number of moves in the allotted time *loses*, unless his or her opponent has insufficient mating material. Some typical time controls are 40 (or 50) moves in two hours, or 40 (or 45) moves in an hour and a half.

Sudden-death time controls have become popular. Sudden-death games must be completed within the prescribed time no matter how many moves it takes. If a player runs out of time, his opponent wins only if he has sufficient remaining material to make checkmate possible.

## RECORDING GAMES

Time controls make it necessary for the players to keep a record of the game in order to know how many moves have been made. (Score keeping is not required for events with time controls of Game/5 to Game/29; see "Rating.") This record will also be a useful study tool. There are two notational systems in common use in the United States—descriptive and algebraic. Our "Keeping Score" flier describes these and other systems. You can find this flyer under forms/brochures on our website [www.uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org).

## CONDUCT OF PLAYERS

Tournament players are not allowed to look at personal or published chess material during a game or to receive either solicited or unsolicited advice from a third party concerning a game in progress. Players are also forbidden to distract or annoy their opponents. Conversation, blitz games, and other forms of distraction should not take place in the playing room. These rules and others are in the USCF *Official Rules of Chess* (catalog number 1690), available at [www.USCFSales.com](http://www.USCFSales.com). Call 1-800-903-USCF for details.

If you are forced to withdraw from an event or miss a round of play, make sure you tell the director in advance. Players who fail to do so are subject to a penalty.

## RATING

USCF ratings are of special interest to many players. These numbers reflect a player's standing relative to other USCF members. There are two separate rating systems for over-the-board (OTB) chess (regular and "quick" ratings), and one rating system for correspondence chess. Quick ratings are used for events with time controls of Game/5 to Game/29, and regular ratings are calculated for tournaments with time controls of Game/30 or slower. Games played with a time control of G/30 to G/60 may be rated in both the quick and regular rating system.

A person's OTB and correspondence ratings are printed on members' *Chess Life* mailing labels and posted on [www.uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org). For more information on either rating system, contact the USCF office.

Novice OTB ratings are often 800 or less, and master ratings start at 2200. Most tournament players are rated between these levels.

## CORRESPONDENCE CHESS TOURNAMENTS

Many USCF members enjoy chess by mail in our various correspondence tournaments as their major form of chess competition. Many others play both correspondence and OTB.

In a typical correspondence section, you play six games—three with White and three with Black. Moves are exchanged on postcards, and play is governed by the official chess rules as specially modified for correspondence chess. Some games may take up to two years to complete, but many do not.

We have a variety of correspondence tournaments available, from the prestigious Golden Knights to the more sociable class tournaments. We now offer rated correspondence chess events—played using e-mail!

If you're interested, please call for more information at (800) 903-USCF (8723), or e-mail the USCF at [cchess@uschess.org](mailto:cchess@uschess.org).

## USCF-RATED ON-LINE TOURNAMENTS

The USCF offers on-line rated events. Please go to the [www.uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org) website, scroll downward, and click on the "Chess Hall of Fame Live" banner for more information.

## QUESTIONS

If you have questions, please address them to a specific department.

For example:

**Ratings Dept.**

**U.S. Chess Federation**

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**Visit the USCF on our website:  
[www.uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org)**

